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ABSTRACT

This publication is intended to help communities take steps to improve the transition to kindergarten for young children with and without disabilities or other special needs in Kansas. The guide covers transition research, elements of effective transition, effective interagency cooperation, information sharing, providing continuity for children and families, developmentally appropriate curriculum in prekindergarten and kindergarten, ideas for involving families, teacher collaboration, individualized education program transition objectives, books to prepare children for transition, a summary of transition statistics for Kansas, and the Community Guide to Transition Planning checklist. (Contains 22 references.) (DB)

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It's a Big Step

Inside you will find:

New ways to encourage entering kindergartners. Page 10

Ideas for involving families. Page 12

Ideas for teachers. Page 13

Report of a survey of Kansas principals. Page 17

A Community Guide for Transition Planning to see how your community measures up. Page 19

Recommended readings to whet your interest. Page 20

Purpose

This publication, one of three on early childhood transitions, is intended to help communities take steps to improve the transition to kindergarten for children and their families. It provides a rationale, relevant research and practical strategies to help all young children and their families move successfully from prekindergarten to kindergarten.

A Guide for Transition to Kindergarten

Prepared by the Bridging Early Services Transition Taskforce, 1995.

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It's a Big Step

Transition to Kindergarten in Kansas Schools

Young children must adjust to many changes. Among them, the transition into kindergarten from home or prekindergarten programs stands as a major milestone for both children and their families.

Some changes that may accompany transition to kindergarten—such as an earlier meal time or elimination of a nap—have little long-term significance for a child or family. But others, such as instability in child care arrangements or marked shifts in adult expectations at home or at school, may influence a young child's sense of security and long-term attitudes toward learning.

As with many other changes, transition to kindergarten creates both challenges and new opportunities for growth. Conquering the challenges can give a child and family additional confidence to meet future transitions. Too much change, however, can create stress, anxiety, fear or confusion, and it can hinder young children's ability to learn.

The goal is to create as much continuity as possible for 5-year-olds entering kindergarten. Research (see References, page 20) has shown:

- Whenever young children can experience success during this significant transition, they grow in confidence and competence to manage later moves.
- Discontinuities in education and care disrupt children's learning and development.
- Local planning by responsible prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers, families and representatives from other community agencies can minimize discontinuities and enhance children's opportunities for success.
- Developmentally appropriate prekindergarten and kindergarten curricula provide continuity for children and promote early success for students with a diversity of abilities and previous experiences.
- Family members often contribute significantly to young children's adjustments to a new environment, but to participate comfortably, parents need information and encouragement to be involved. Their culture and goals for their child and family must be valued.
- Families who feel welcome at their local school are likely to continue active involvement in their children's education.
- Planned activities can help children and families cope with necessary changes and negotiate transitions successfully.
- Written procedures and timelines help communities to ensure that transition activities occur on schedule.
- Transition planning helps to assure that the special needs of children and families are met, necessary information about children's special learning characteristics

Transition Feels Like ...

YOUR FIRST AIRPLANE FLIGHT: It's exciting, but also scary.

GOING UPSTAIRS: You take one step at a time.

TRYING A NEW RECIPE: You hope that all the ingredients will add up to a good taste.

A BRIDGE: It's a crossing between two places of security.

A VACATION: Planning helps prevent mishaps.

PLAYING CARDS: It's more fun to do it with friends.

DIVING OFF A CLIFF: It's a step into the unknown.

YOUR FIRST DATE: You don't want to look foolish.

A SANDWICH: The significant stuff is wedged between the bread of everyday routines.

A MARRIAGE: It happens on one day but requires a lot of effort both before and after.

A RAINBOW: A hopeful new beginning.

is shared and special equipment and training in its use are provided in a timely manner.

- Good beginnings help to minimize or avert later problems, such as academic failure, school drop-out and anti-social actions.
- When prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers, families and representatives of other community agencies plan together, the transition process works better than when the responsible parties do not cooperate.

Community-wide planning for transition to kindergarten has been encouraged by the federal government under the National Education Goals, as a part of site-based planning in the state's school restructuring, and by myriad position statements from professional organizations (page 18). Transition planning is consistent with the position of the Kansas State Board of Education that support for children's development is the shared responsibility of families, schools and other agencies in the community.

Recognizing the Partners

Who's Involved in Transition?

Transition is about children and their families moving between programs. Any child or parent may appear confident about moving on or concerned about real or fantasized risks. Many parents have questions about what will be expected of their child in kindergarten. In addition to the normal upheaval of beginning at a new school, many children have special needs to be met in transition. Planning can help children and their families reduce anxiety about transition and, instead, anticipate the exciting opportunities of the school years.

Transition is about teachers and care providers supporting children and their families during the move between programs. The annual process of sending one class of children on and then receiving a new group of students challenges adults who work with them. Transition planning helps adults to share questions and information with each other to ease each child's entry into kindergarten. Cooperative transition planning among responsible teachers and care providers also helps them build programs that support each other and create continuity for children and their families.

Transition is about administrators of prekindergarten and kindergarten programs and community service agencies—those most responsible for initiating the community's plan for transition. Administrators can set policies and practices to improve transitions. When they work together, agency administrators can provide information and services that families need to support their children. Joint efforts can reduce unnecessary miscommunication when the school doors open in fall.

Who Are the Partners in Transition?

Children who will reach age 5 on or before August 31

Parents, guardians, grandparents and other family members

Prekindergarten programs, staff and administrators
- Home
- Head Start
- Chapter 1/Title 1
- Even Start
- Private preschool (formerly called nursery school)
- Child care center
- Family child care home
- Public school-sponsored preschool
- Early childhood special education services
- Community recreation or library program

Kindergarten programs, staff and administrators
- Neighborhood public school
- Public magnet school
- Private school
- Parochial school
- Developmental or transitional kindergarten
- Chapter 1/Title 1
- Special education services
- School-based child care
- Child care center
- Family child care home

Other community agencies
- Public health department
- Community recreation programs
- Mental health services
- Social and Rehabilitation Services
- Church programs

A variety of agencies and programs functioning under different sponsorships and rules may be partners in transition for a single child. Several common participants are briefly described below.

Head Start is a federal program that provides comprehensive education, health and social services to prekindergarten children and their families. The family must have low income to be eligible for services. At least 10% of Head Start enrollment must be children with identified disabilities. Federal Head Start funds come directly to local grantees, which may be community agencies or school systems. Educational services are provided in half-day, whole-day or home-based formats. Teachers must have at least a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and many have bachelor's or master's degrees. Head Start requires a developmentally appropriate curriculum and continuing education for staff.

Chapter 1/Title 1 is a federal program that flows funds through each state to local school districts. Districts may choose to use Title 1 funds for prekindergarten or kindergarten programs, as well as for services to older students. Children are eligible according to educational need. Currently, preschool teachers need not be certified but kindergarten teachers must be. Local districts determine inservice requirements for teachers, as well as the curriculum and program philosophy to be implemented.

Even Start is a federal program administered by the Kansas State Board of Education through competitive grants to local partnerships between schools and other community agencies, such as community colleges. Even Start is a family literacy project for parents who haven't finished high school. It also includes preschool and child care services in public schools or the community, coordination of health and social services for the family, and parenting education and job training for parents. Local grantees determine the qualifications and inservice requirements for their teachers, as well as curric-

At the Heart of Transition Planning ...

Developmentally appropriate practice has two key principles: age appropriateness and individual appropriateness. All programs of care and education for children from birth to age 8 should be developmentally appropriate. Additional information about this concept may be found in Bredekamp (1987), as listed in the Reference section.

Ways That Prekindergarten and Kindergarten May Differ

- Adult/child ratio
- Number of children in school, class and groups
- Length of class periods
- Transportation arrangements
- Nature and degree of family involvement
- Expectations for independent play and work
- Expectations for managing materials and clothing
- Expected skills with equipment
- Amount of teacher attention and individual assistance
- Philosophies of instruction and behavioral guidance
- Curriculum content
- Amount of waiting required
- Nature of teacher's guidance or directions
- Expected knowledge of health and safety rules
- Daily routines
- Playground activities

ula for Even Start classrooms.

Community early childhood programs include not-for-profit and for-profit preschools and child care centers. All are required to meet state health and safety guidelines but otherwise independently determine their curriculum and philosophy. Many teachers in these programs have at least bachelor's degrees, but lesser qualifications are acceptable, according to the *Kansas Regulations for Licensing*. Specific requirements depend upon the number of children to be served. A minimum of 10 hours of inservice training annually is required for staff in licensed programs. Curricula and philosophies of community-based programs vary widely. Programs accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs are committed to developmentally appropriate practices. Preschools typically meet for 2 1/2 to 3 hours on two or three days per week. Child care centers most often provide care for children while their parents are employed. Usually they are open a minimum of 10 hours per day. Many include a preschool/educational component. Often child care centers serve both prekindergarten- and kindergarten-aged children.

Family child care homes involve one or more adults caring for children of various ages in a residential setting throughout the day. Individual providers who choose to register with the state are required to meet state health and safety standards. Homes vary considerably in the types of activities they provide for young children who attend. Similarly, the responsible adults differ in their levels of preparation and participation in continuing education opportunities. Licensed providers have the CDA credential or meet other guidelines outlined in the *Kansas Regulations for Licensing*. They also participate in at least 5 hours of continuing education annually.

Public school-sponsored preschool services are supported with local funds, plus state and federal special education money. In Kansas they serve primarily children without disabilities, but many also include some students with special needs. Criteria for attendance are determined locally, except that children with documented need for special education services are automatically eligible after their third birthdays. Teachers in school-sponsored preschool services must be certified by the state and meet inservice training requirements. Most school-sponsored preschools provide half-day sessions for two or four days per week. Children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) may receive different or additional services beyond those provided to other community residents. School-sponsored programs that have been accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs are committed to developmentally appropriate practices.

Kindergartens in public, private or parochial schools typically provide half-day or whole-day sessions five days per week under the leadership of certified teachers. All children age 5 on or before August 31 are eligible to attend public school kindergarten. Teachers must meet inservice training requirements to renew their teaching certificates. Curriculum and philosophy of instruction are locally determined. Kindergartens accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs demonstrate their commitment to developmentally appropriate practices.

Transitional or developmental kindergartens have been established in some districts to provide an intensive learning experience before or after the traditional kindergarten year to children judged "immature" or "at risk for school failure." These programs have been declining in number due to research evidence that they are not effec-

tive in the longterm and may actually be harmful to some children (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1988; May & Welch, 1985, 1986). The national trend is toward developmentally appropriate primary grades, which accommodate children functioning at various developmental levels. Transitional classrooms are led by certified teachers who use locally determined curricula and satisfy local inservice plans.

"I felt like I was taking my child from the loving arms of the preschool teacher and placing her in the welcoming hands of the kindergarten teacher."

Salina mother

Special education is provided to eligible children to meet their individual needs. Education and related services, such as speech-language, physical or occupational therapy, can be delivered in any setting: from the regular prekindergarten or kindergarten classroom to a small-group therapy room, in a self-contained special education classroom or hospital or even at home. Most children in Kansas receive special education services in a regular classroom. Justification must be provided any time a child is removed from placement with nondisabled peers. Special education teachers must be certified by the state. Curriculum and services, as well as ongoing measures of progress, for students in special education are individually determined by each child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Elements of Effective Transitions

1. All adults who are responsible for children's care and education share in developing a written transition plan for the community.
2. A series of transition activities is planned to prepare young children and their parents.
3. Transition plans seek to involve families in decision-making and support them in active participation in their children's care and education.
4. Transition policies, programs and practices demonstrate sensitivity to the culture, language and previous experiences of individual children and their families.
5. Information to support a child's development is shared (with parent permission) across home, child care, prekindergarten programs, kindergarten and health care settings.
6. Receiving programs welcome all children and families and locate information and other resources to help them.
7. Efforts to help children feel secure across settings are bolstered by continuity in assessment, curriculum and instruction—all sensitive to individual, developmental and cultural differences.
8. The community has developed a coordinated approach to staff development that brings prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers and care providers together to discuss, learn and plan.
9. Transition procedures are written and then followed; transition outcomes are noted and used to improve future efforts.

One Step at a Time

Community Planning Improves Transitions

The Taskforce recommends a planning process for each community to smooth the months of transition to kindergarten for young children and their families. The accompanying nine-step diagram will help readers understand this process. All the transition's key partners should be involved in the planning process. Broad participation in planning will result in transition practices that are consistent with each community's values, resources and limitations.

Page 19 of this guide offers a self-assessment form that can be used to start a community's transition planning. Some communities need to start at step one and build the relationships that allow effective transitions to occur. Other communities already have the relationships and much of the process in place. They are ready to write their activities into a transition timeline and a written interagency agreement.

An important product of local planning is a written timeline for transition. When will parents be invited to visit the kindergarten? How and when will pupil information be shared between the prekindergarten programs and the school system? When will comprehensive evaluations be performed for those children with IEPs? When will planning begin for children who need special equipment or individual health care plans? A written timeline will help teachers and administrators as well as parents know what to expect.

A valuable tool to ensure that transition will unfold smoothly is a written community transition agreement. Creating such a plan is not the first transition task for a community to undertake, but it is a worthy goal to aim toward. The critical components of an interagency agreement are found in the box on page 8.

Developing interagency transition agreements and timelines is useful in ensuring continuity of services, helping a community to prepare all of its new kindergartners adequately, welcoming new families to the school community and assuring that all school personnel—including recently hired teachers—have current information that can help them teach each child effectively.

Community Transition Planning

1. State purpose of plan: Transition between prekindergarten and kindergarten.

2. Identify planners: Families, prekindergarten and kindergarten personnel, community representatives.

3. Define current transition procedures, activities and timelines of each participating program.

4. Compare present transition procedures with desired process to identify gaps and overlaps. Identify roles for families and programs.

5. Identify practices to modify or initiate to create smoother transitions for children, families, programs and schools.

6. Combine current practices and modifications into a written interagency transition agreement. Develop guidelines and materials for families.

7. Implement the plan to meet needs of individual children and families.

8. Evaluate transitions, consider multiple views.

9. Review and revise plan, expand transition efforts.

Elements of a Written Interagency Transition Agreement

- Time period covered by the agreement
- List of agencies involved
- Statement of purpose for the agreement
- Designation of roles and responsibilities, including relationships among agencies that sign the agreement and assignments for planning and implementing transition activities
- Definition of fiscal responsibility, specifying who will pay for each service—prekindergarten program, school system, other community agency or the family (special education services must be free to the family)
- Description of procedures for:
  - Informing and supporting families through the transition
  - Gathering and sharing information across programs
  - Transferring of records
  - Obtaining family consent for release of information to other agencies
  - Developing timelines and designating responsibilities for children who need special education services, including:
    - Comprehensive evaluation, if warranted
    - Determination of eligibility for services
    - Assessments for instructional planning
    - Convening the multidisciplinary conference
    - Writing the IEP
    - Decision-making regarding placement and services
    - Special training of staff
    - Acquiring needed adaptive equipment or assistive technology
  - Ongoing communication
- Plans for evaluating transition activities

Requirements for Kindergarten

Age 5 on or before August 31

An official birth certificate from the state in which the child was born

Age-appropriate immunizations as evidenced by an official record from a physician's office, county health department or Kansas Certificate of Immunizations

A Social Security number

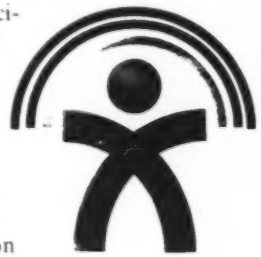
A physical examination/health assessment by a certified health professional (no later than 90 days after kindergarten entry)

Creating a Safe Landing

Continue Necessary Services

One persistent issue for many communities is how family services previously arranged by Head Start or other comprehensive preschool programs will continue to be provided after children have entered kindergarten. To resolve this question, it is essential to have participation by other community agencies in addition to the school system. In many cases children and families continue to need the services that Head Start has helped to coordinate but that schools do not routinely provide.

If, for example, a 4-year-old and her parents have been receiving mental health services as part of the Head Start program, this information should be shared (with parent permission) with the elementary school counselor, who may either provide that service or refer the family to a local mental health agency that serves school-aged children. Parenting education previously provided by the local preschool association may be continued through a PTA-sponsored program or via referral to a county extension program. Health and nutrition services may shift from Head Start coordination to the local health department or a school-based clinic.



Community commitment to ongoing, coordinated support for vulnerable young children and their families allows maximum use of existing resources within and outside of schools to foster children's development.

Effective transitions also require ongoing leadership and advocacy. A good practice is for each participating agency—representing a prekindergarten program or a kindergarten program—to name a knowledgeable and committed Transition Coordinator. These leaders can work together over time to develop workable transition procedures and refine the community's transition plan.

What Does a Transition Coordinator Do?

Transition Coordinators may guide the development of the community's transition plan and annual transition activities, serve as a clearinghouse for information, answer families' questions, and help the prekindergarten and kindergarten partners work together to create a smooth transition. Many Transition Coordinators spend only a small amount of their work time on these activities. Two Kansas communities, however, have enlarged the role with very positive results.

SALINA: At Heartland Early Education Program, kindergarten transition consultants help children who have been in Head Start or Early Childhood Special Education and their families make the move to kindergarten.

Funded by Head Start and Chapter 1, the consultants are experienced early childhood educators. They assist before and during the kindergarten year by helping families locate needed services, meeting with kindergarten teachers weekly to support children's progress and making regularly scheduled home visits to extend children's school learning into the home. They exchange ideas about implementing developmentally appropriate practice with the kindergarten teachers and even substitute for them on occasion to allow the teachers to visit other kindergarten classrooms.

According to Korey Powell-Hensley, Head Start director, the program has been enthusiastically received by kindergarten teachers and principals, as well as by families.

WELLINGTON: Kindergarten Connection supports children and families from the Learning Express (early childhood special education and Head Start) and community early childhood programs as they enter kindergarten. Education Services Specialist Becky Greer helps kindergarten teachers find ways for all children to succeed.

Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers meet regularly in classrooms to learn about each other's programs, discuss ways to involve families in their schools and improve communication and timelines related to transition. The teachers visit in each other's classrooms. They also plan together a Parent-Child Fair for the Week of the Young Child. The coordinator position is funded through an interagency agreement between Futures Unlimited and USD 353.

Step Along
Information Sharing

Specific strategies for sharing information about children among sending and receiving teachers and family members are defined within the community's transition plan. One adult's parental or professional observations about a child can be very useful to other adults in understanding the child's interests and learning style.

- Parents must give written consent for information to be shared across agencies
- Communication can be oral, written and via videotapes
- Forward records prior to the beginning of school
- Records should be sent, not only to the school office, but also to the teacher who will be working with the child
- In many communities, face-to-face or telephone consultation between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers before and after children move is also possible
- A brief report from the prekindergarten teacher to the kindergarten teacher may improve the first days in the new school. See sample below.

CHILD'S NAME _____

PREKINDERGARTEN _____ TEACHER _____

KINDERGARTEN _____

INTERESTS _____

_____

SPECIAL TALENTS _____

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS _____

CURRENT LEARNING ACTIVITIES _____

_____

Ready, Set, Go
Providing Continuity for Children and Families

In effective transitions, prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers and families work together to plan and carry out activities to support children during movement from one location to another. A variety of transition activities have been found useful in Kansas programs.

Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers who have visited each other's classrooms know how to incorporate symbols of continuity for children. For example, rereading a favorite preschool book during the first week of kindergarten or teaching a special kindergarten song to Head Start children helps 5-year-olds to feel secure during transition.

One kindergarten teacher observed a reading corner where children at the child care center were "reading" to teddy bears. When she instituted such a center in her room, it was a great hit with entering kindergartners. This was one learning center they did not have to discover how to use!

Suggested Activities To Create Continuity

- Prekindergarten parent meeting to explain transition activities and kindergarten enrollment procedures
- Prekindergarten visit of children to kindergarten
- Breakfast of small groups of children with the principal, either at the elementary school or at the child care center/Head Start
- Personal note from the kindergarten teacher to each entering student during the week prior to the beginning of school
- Home visit by the kindergarten teacher and/or principal, or by prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers together
- Visit to the preschool or Head Start by kindergartners who are "alumni"
- Prekindergarten visit to the playground of the primary school, guided either by the prekindergarten program or by children's families
- IEP objectives designed to help children feel confident and competent in their new surroundings
- Sharing by kindergarten teachers of their goals and expectations for their students
- "Parent mentors"—experienced parents to help welcome new families to the school
- Trial bus rides where parents may accompany their new kindergartners
- Parent orientation booklet for schools to send to families
- School orientation booklet for families to send to teachers (see sample topics, page 12)
- A prekindergarten/kindergarten curriculum study group open to interested teachers and parents to explore ways to promote continuity in teaching approaches and materials
- Identifying special songs, games, books or class activities to be used in both prekindergarten and kindergarten
- Sharing roleplays and books that help children anticipate kindergarten (see list, page 15).
- Providing tips for families on supporting their children's early learning and subsequent entrance to school
- Collaboration with the local health department to ensure that entering children have necessary health checks and immunizations
- Repeated demonstration and explanation by both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers of prepositions and other direction words that young children will encounter
- "Partnering" more knowledgeable kindergartners with peers who understand the routines

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Right from the Start
Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten

To help every child get a good start in school, it's important for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers and administrators in every Kansas town to communicate about curriculum. The goal of this communication is to continue individual children's growth, begun prior to kindergarten, by first maintaining and then gradually enriching prekindergarten skills, experiences, activities and expectations. Ongoing communication between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers also helps to develop appropriate adaptations for individual children who need modifications to continue learning.

Within any age group of children, there exists a broad range in maturity levels, interests, abilities and special needs. It's essential that both prekindergarten and kindergarten activities be formulated for young children, encouraging learning through manipulation of materials and frequent exchange of ideas with adults and other children. Learning materials for use both indoors and on the playground must be accessible to all.

"Since teachers have been taking turns visiting each other's programs, we understand better what others are dealing with. We're beginning to share ideas about effective teaching."
Junction City teacher

Transition policies consistent with current research discourage "waiting a year" or retention or special "readiness" placement of children at the kindergarten level. A growing body of research shows that such practices are not effective over the long term (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1988; May & Welch, 1985, 1986; Shepard & Smith, 1986). Separating children from their neighborhood agemates may stigmatize and discourage them.

Proven transition practices ensure that children progress in multi-ability groups and receive instruction appropriate for individual levels of development. In early care and education as well as in kindergarten, curricula related to children's daily experiences help young children learn and enjoy learning. Cooperative groups encourage children in both prekindergarten and kindergarten to solve problems and learn to work together. Use of a variety of activity structures within a class can help teachers meet the diverse needs of their students.

Activity Structures

Use of a combination of activity structures allows a prekindergarten or kindergarten class to be developmentally appropriate for children learning at different levels. Activities related to any topic can be structured in five ways:

SAME. All the children participate in the same activity with the same curricular emphasis and objectives. This should be used only a small percentage of the time with young children.

MULTI-LEVEL. All children participate in the same activity or lesson but at different levels.

CURRICULUM OVERLAPPING. All children participate in the same activity, but each has a different objective.

ALTERNATIVE. One or more children participate in an alternative activity, rather than the general class activity; the sub-group then has different objectives than classmates.

DIVERSE. Children participate individually or in small groups in a variety of different activities with different objectives.

adapted from Grangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson (1992)

U.S. Department of Education. (1991). *Preparing young children for success: Guideposts for achieving our first national education goal* (pp 5-7). Washington, DC: Author.

"Build connections among parents, preschools and elementary schools to ensure smooth and coherent transitions. Systematic transition activities will promote instruction that is appropriate for the ages and personal characteristics of entering students, help parents and children understand and shape school expectations and inform teachers about each child. Home visits and other contacts between school staff and families, transfer of records, joint training and curriculum development by preschool and primary school staff, and the coordinated delivery of support services are examples of transition activities."

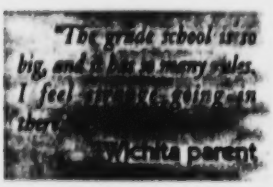
Stepping Together

Ideas for Involving Families

Early in the year prior to the child's kindergarten entry, prekindergarten programs should explain the transition process to family members and welcome their participation in transition activities. Later, families should be invited to visit kindergarten classrooms and learn about routine procedures of the elementary school. Customs such as checking in at the school office and preferred ways and times to communicate with kindergarten teachers need to be explained.

Davidson triplets on their first day of kindergarten, Newton.

Opportunities for parents to assist with school activities can be shared, and volunteers for specific projects enlisted. Through a "Transition Activities" booklet, parents can be encouraged to enjoy books with their children, to expand the ways they stimulate vocabulary development, and to support independence in self-care skills, like zipping and putting on boots.



Cultural groups regard formal education and professional educators in different ways, a fact to be considered carefully during the community's transition planning process. Prekindergarten teachers contribute significantly to a smooth transition when they communicate parental preferences and interpret family actions. As a result, they promote positive communication between the family and the new teacher.

Kindergarten teachers are wise to seek guidance from sending teachers when questions with cultural implications arise. Communications about transition may need to be translated into languages other than English. A community liaison from a family's linguistic or cultural group may aid in interpreting the ways of the school to family members uncertain how to proceed in transition.

> *"The principal came right over to meet us, and then I knew it would be all right."*
>
> **McPherson parent**

The transition process aims, among other purposes, to help families accomplish their goals for their children's learning. Many parents appreciate the opportunity to talk with other families who experienced transition with their children during the previous year. Prekindergarten programs can arrange such conversations during "On to Kindergarten" meetings for family members or on a more one-on-one basis for families who prefer personal contact.

Throughout the transition process, it's important for both prekindergarten and kindergarten programs to show family members that they are valued, respected, included and supported as partners in child development. A brief form with open-ended questions, such as the one here, gives schools the benefit of family perspectives on their children's talents, interests and needs.

Helpful Information From Families

1. I would describe our child in this way
2. I would describe our family in this way
3. A typical day with our child includes
4. Our child really likes to do (or is good at) these things
5. Our child needs help with (avoids)
6. Our family likes to do these things together
7. Recent changes seen in our child at home
8. Questions we have about our child
9. Our child does best when
10. When our child wants something, she lets us know by
11. Our child is really interested in
12. We would like our child to learn or get better at
13. To help our child, we would like help with

adapted from Project Dakota

Teachers Together
Communication Improves Transition Steps

Professional development on most topics is relevant to both prekindergarten and kindergarten personnel across classrooms, disciplines and programs. Joint training (Head Start, child care, preschool and kindergarten teachers) promotes continuity in services, builds relationships to aid problem-solving, increases respect for one another's roles in transition and helps to define the transition activities that will aid children's entry into elementary school.

"The preschool took a field trip to the kindergarten. Everybody had a good time. It helped the children look forward to going to kindergarten."
Wellington teacher

A 1994 study of service providers in 50 states found that training and technical assistance for staff were rated highest of 13 priorities related to improving transitions (Shotts, Rosenkoetter, Streufert & Rosenkoetter).

Some recommendations for Kansas communities to increase communication between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers include:

- Schedule regular meetings and sharing sessions
- Plan cross-classroom visits
- Learn new skills together
- Study and discuss policy statements and new publications
- Attend early childhood conferences and inservices together
- Urge the education service center to sponsor training that brings together prekindergarten and kindergarten, "regular" education and special education
- Visit classrooms in nearby areas that are working toward being developmentally appropriate and inclusive
- Find the rules on confidentiality between agencies, and develop a locally-appropriate way to satisfy them
- Work together with a consultant to develop a local philosophy and curriculum that provides continuity for young children and success for all
- Use peer coaching to support and assist each other
- Celebrate accomplishments together
- Evaluate and share information with parents, colleagues and the public

Parents View Transition Differently

"Stephie will be going to kindergarten just like her older brothers and sisters did. I'm sure that she'll do fine. It's no big deal."
Lindsborg parent

"My son has always been a bit shy. He learns well, but sometimes it takes him longer than other children. I'm nervous about what could happen in kindergarten."
Lawrence parent

"I'm proud of our son and our family because we have survived numerous transitions—from neonatal intensive care to home, from Parents as Teachers to Head Start, from Head Start to kindergarten. There are more transitions ahead, but we can do it!"
Johnson County parent

"Mikey doesn't talk much. I hope the teachers over there will know what he needs."
Junction City parent

"This is a great day! Montoya is my youngest. She's ready for some new challenges and so am I."
Independence mother

"My daughter has Down Syndrome. She will be in a regular kindergarten class. The school system has been wonderful about working with us to help her transition to kindergarten be successful."
Wichita parent

"Janeisha is a real clown. I hope that she can behave when she goes up to that big school."
Kansas City parent

Step on Up

Special Issues with Children with Special Needs

Some additional planning may be needed for children with special needs. Consider these questions:

- What IEP objectives should be written during prekindergarten to help prepare the child for kindergarten? (see Non-academic Skills, page 18)
- What additional evaluation, if any, is needed?
- What assessment data from the prekindergarten program can be used to determine eligibility for special education or program planning in the IEP?
- If a categorical label is to be written on the IEP, what will it be?
- How will the placement decision be made and when?
- What equipment needs to be obtained for use at the new school?
- What training do new staff need to accommodate the child's special needs?

"This is a scary time for my husband and me. We want to be sure we're doing the right things."

Prairie Village parent of a child with disabilities

Although a comprehensive evaluation is required every three years, many school districts choose to re-evaluate children from early childhood special education prior to their kindergarten entry. It is important that this assessment includes data from the prekindergarten program to show how the child performs in a familiar setting. With parent permission, assessment data from Head Start or other prekindergarten programs can be shared with the schools. The procedures for procuring permission to share information and actually sending reports on to the kindergarten teacher should be included in the written interagency transition agreement.

Another special needs issue concerns categorical labeling. Young children with identified disabilities may be served without a label on IEPs signed prior to age 6. Thereafter, a designation such as "hearing impairment," "learning disability" or "mental retardation" must be attached to the child's records to maintain eligibility for services. Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers should discuss possible categories with parents early to prevent surprise and undue stress at the conference when a label must be assigned.

The transition process should be explained to families both verbally and in writing early in the year before the child's eligibility for kindergarten. Parents of children receiving special education need to know that their child definitely will be moving on from preschool. Families deserve opportunities to clarify the process, visit potential locations for services and offer information from home that may assist in decision-making. Families should be encouraged to bring a relative or friend with them to transition meetings, if they wish.

It's important that all transition actions occur in a timely manner. Decisions regarding placement should routinely be made in time for children with special needs to participate in "Kindergarten Roundup" or other kindergarten orientations along with their neighborhood friends. Some children, including many with visual impairments, may benefit from an individualized tour of the new classroom prior to the beginning of school.

IEP objectives during both the prekindergarten and kindergarten years may well include skills that help the child to adjust and learn in school. "Readiness for kindergarten" cannot be forced, but some useful skills, such as participating in a large group, playing or working independently and with peers and asking for help, can be taught (see page 18). Mastery of some of the skills required for membership in a large class will help the child feel more comfortable in kindergarten.

Identification of a child's eligibility for special education services does not mean he or she will automatically be placed in a special education classroom. The great majority of Kansas children with IEPs are served in their neighborhood kindergartens with special support provided as individually appropriate.

Accomplishing inclusion successfully for some children with disabilities may require training for kindergarten teachers and other school staff, curricular adaptations, special equipment or assistance from a paraprofessional. It surely will require ongoing consultation between special education and general education personnel.

The prekindergarten teachers and therapists can be helpful in the decision-making process because they know the child and family well. The community transition plan should include time for prekindergarten and kindergarten personnel to talk about students with special needs. For children with special health care needs, orientation and ongoing support of the kindergarten teachers by the school nurse, the county health department or physicians' staff may be useful.

Books To Prepare Children for Transition

Author	Title
Alexander	Sabrina
Allard	Miss Nelson Is Missing!
Anderson	Carlos Goes to School
Arnold	Where Do You Go to School?
Barkin	I'd Rather Stay Home
Barkin	Sometimes I Hate School
Behrens	What I Hear in My School
Berenstain	The Berenstain Bears Go to School
Boyd	I Met a Polar Bear
Bram	I Don't Want to Go to School
Breinburg	Shawn Goes to School
Buchmeier	I Know a Teacher
Burningham	The School
Calmenson	The Kindergarten Book
Cassidy	We Like Kindergarten
Caudill	A Pocketful of Cricket
Charles	Calico Cat at School
Cohen	The New Teacher
Cohen	No Good in Art
Cohen	When Will I Read
Cohen	See You Tomorrow, Charles
Cohen	Will I Have a Friend?
Cohen	First Grade Takes a Test
Cole	What's Good for a Five-Year-Old?
Delton	The New Girl at School
Elliott	Grover Goes to School
Frandsen	I Started School Today
Gordon	Crystal Is the New Girl
Haas	A Special Place for Johnny
Hamilton-Meritt	My First Days of School
Harris	The School Mouse
Hillert	Who Goes to School?
Hoffman	Steffie and Me
Holland	First Day of School
Horvath	Will the Real Tommy Wilson Please Stand Up
Hurd	Come with Me to Nursery School
Isadora	Willaby
Jones	Going to Kindergarten
Lenski	Debbie Goes to Nursery School
Lexau	I Hate Red Rover
Lystad	Jennifer Takes Over P.S. 94
Mann	The 25 Cent Friend
Marino	Where Are the Mothers?
Marshall	Fox at School
Marshall	Miss Nelson Is Back
Mason	I Go to School
Matthias	Out the Door
McInnes	Goodnight Painted Pony
Meshover	The Monkey that Went to School
Nichols	Big Paul's School Bus
Oppenheim	Mrs. Peloski's Snake
Ormsby	Twenty One Children
Oxenbury	First Day of School
Parish	Jumper Goes to School
Quackenbush	First Grade Jitters
Relf	The First Day of School
Relf	Show and Tell
Rockwell	My Nursery School
Rogers	Mr. Rogers Talks About...
Schick	The Little School at Cottonwood Corners
Schwartz	Bea and Mr. Jones
Simon	I'm Busy Too
Stein	A Child Goes to School
Steiner	I'd Rather Stay With You
Steptoe	Jeffrey Bear Cleans Up His Act
Thwaite	The Chatterbox
Tobias	The Dawdlewalk
Udry	What Mary Jo Shared
Welbar	Goodbye, Hello
Wells	Timothy Goes to School
Wisema	Morris Goes to School
Wittman	The Wonderful Mrs. Trumbly
Wolde	Betsy's First Day at Nursery School
Wolf	Adam Smith Goes to School
Wooley	Gus Was a Real Dumb Ghost

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Reforming Kansas Schools

Results of Transition Planning

In communities that have developed a plan for transition to kindergarten, transition procedures and their outcomes are documented, analyzed, reported and used to refine future collaborative efforts. Evaluation is used to improve the relationships among transition partners and the practices that they employ together and separately. A number of measurable indicators can be used:

- Children's adjustment during the first week of kindergarten and beyond
- Children's learning during the first several weeks of school and beyond
- Number of children "liking" school and the reverse
- Parent satisfaction
- Number of parents involved in school activities
- Prekindergarten and kindergarten teacher satisfaction

Transition... Happens

Kansas Principals Report on Current Transition Practices

Midyear 1994 all Kansas elementary school principals were asked to complete a 12-page survey describing their prekindergarten and kindergarten practices, especially those related to transition. The Kansas survey imitated a national study (Love et al., 1992) sponsored by two federal agencies.

Sixty percent of Kansas principals replied, yielding a total of 559 usable responses. Kansas respondents described the locations of their schools as "rural," 25%; "small town," 31%; "small city," 16%; "urban fringe/suburban," 17%, and "urban/central city," 10%. Sixty percent indicated that their schools have fewer than 300 students. Following are a few of the major findings from the study, paired with findings from the national data. A complete report on both studies is available from Bridging Early Services Transition Project, 316-241-7754.

KANSAS

Prekindergarten Programs

- 50% of incoming kindergartners have attended a formal pre-K program
- 35% of schools have some type of pre-K program within their buildings

Adjustment to Kindergarten

- 75% of principals said that 0-9% of children have difficulty adjusting to kindergarten, 25% said more than 9% have problems. Meeting academic demands was the area of greatest difficulty, with frequent concerns expressed about children complying with behavioral expectations and interacting appropriately with other children

Kindergarten Programs

- Principals described their K programs as "developmental" (54%) or "progressive" (20%) or "traditional" (13%)

Transition Practices

- Pre-K programs initiate transition activities in 40% of communities, followed by parents (19%) and school district (11%)
- Typically "some" transition activity occurs—some teachers, some efforts, some children, some families
- Visits to kindergarten by entering children and their parents occur for most families in 76% of Kansas schools; 75% of schools organize family visits to the kindergarten prior to entry
- 8% of communities have a written policy or plan for transition
- 75% of schools do not have a transition coordinator
- 74% of communities have not evaluated transition in any way as part of school reform or a "readiness" agenda
- In spite of "recommended practice" guidelines to the contrary, 66% percent of Kansas schools retain children in K and 29% sponsor transition classes
- 81% of schools report planned activities for transition between K and grade 1

Pre-K/K Teacher Collaboration

- In 10% of communities there is a systematic plan by the school to collect information from pre-K caregivers or teachers for all children
- In 70% of communities there is no or very little participation in shared pre-K/K teacher inservices or curriculum discussions
- 27% of schools report planned linkage between pre-K and K curriculum
- In 60% of schools pre-K and K teachers do not communicate about students or communicate only when children experience serious adjustment problems
- About 55% of communities have a systematic plan to transfer records from pre-K teacher to K teacher for at least some children

THE NATION

Prekindergarten Programs

- 49% of incoming kindergartners have attended a formal pre-K program
- About 25% of schools have a pre-K program in their buildings

Adjustment to Kindergarten

- 77% of principals report that under 10% of incoming kindergartners have difficulty adjusting to K, with the area of greatest difficulty seen as adjusting to academic demands (18% said more than 20% of children have difficulty here), followed by meeting the school's behavioral expectations

Kindergarten Programs

- Principals described their K programs as "developmental" (44%), "traditional" (19%), or "academic" (17%)

Transition Practices

- K teachers (36%) initiate transition activities in most communities, followed by school building administrators (24%), district administrators (18%), and pre-K programs (7%)
- Typically some activity—most likely related to children with special needs
- Visits to kindergarten by entering children and their parents occur for most families in 64% of American schools; 68% of schools organize family visits to the kindergarten prior to entry
- 13% of communities have a written policy or plan for transition
- 64% of schools do not have a transition coordinator
- 53% of communities have not evaluated outcomes of transition activities
- 61% of public schools retain children in K. 23% use transition classes
- 80% of schools coordinate transition between K and grade 1

Pre-K/K Teacher Collaboration

- In 10% of communities there is a systematic plan by the school to collect information from pre-K caregivers or teachers for all children
- In 75% of communities there is no or very little participation in shared pre-K/K teacher inservices or curriculum discussions
- 20% of schools report planned linkage between pre-K and K curriculum
- In 70% of schools pre-K and K teachers do not communicate about students or communicate only when children experience serious adjustment problems
- About 50% of communities have a systematic plan to transfer records from pre-K teacher to K teacher for at least some children

What do these findings mean? In a number of areas Kansans have made a good start toward easing children's transition to kindergarten. However, according to survey data, most efforts tend to be informal, episodic and implemented by a single agency (the school or Head Start or the special education cooperative) or by an individual teacher—rather than through a coordinated plan developed by pre-kindergarten and kindergarten personnel working together with families. Use of the planning form ("Community Guide for Transition Planning") on page 19 can help communities to improve transitions for all their children and families.

Non-academic Skills Useful in Kindergarten

(This list should never be used as entrance criteria. It is intended to help prekindergarten teachers and families plan activities or IEP goals to build children's readiness to participate in kindergarten-sized classes)

Interacting with peers

- Initiates and maintains contact with peers
- Imitates peers when learning a new routine
- Responds to peers' initiations
- Learns and uses names of peers
- Shares objects and turns with peers
- Plans with peers

Playing/working independently and with others

- Plays/works appropriately with peers and alone
- Completes activities approximately on time
- Stays with an activity for an appropriate amount of time
- Plays/works with few individual reminders from teacher

Responding to routines

- Cares for personal belongings
- Learns new routines after practice opportunities
- Moves from one activity to another without individual reminders
- Reacts appropriately to changes in routines

Following directions

- Watches others or seeks help if doesn't understand directions
- Answers adults' questions
- Modifies behavior when given verbal feedback
- Complies with group as well as individual instructions
- Responds appropriately to spoken multi-step directions
- Responds appropriately to directions, which include common school-related prepositions, nouns and verbs
- Recalls and follows directions discussed/demonstrated previously

Following classroom rules

- Separates from parents and accepts teacher's authority
- Seeks teacher's attention in acceptable ways
- Expresses feelings in acceptable ways
- Focuses attention on speaker, shifts attention appropriately and participates in class activities
- Sits and listens for brief periods
- Waits for brief periods for peers to assemble

Quotes from Position Papers

National Association of State Boards of Education. (1988). *Right from the start: The report of the NASBE task-force on early childhood education* (pp. 19, 20, 27). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Programs that serve children preschool-grade 3 should provide a gradual and supportive transition process from home to school for those young children entering school for the first time (p. 19). Develop both a school district and a local school action plan for parent involvement in the early childhood unit, and for parental outreach and family support efforts by public schools. The plan should include the following elements:...provisions for young children to make an incremental transition from home to school when entering for the first time (p. 20)....transitions occur annually as children move between program types, and they occur daily as children move from school to child care. We believe there is greater continuity for children and parents when both types of programs are developmentally appropriate. Schools can facilitate this transition by helping to ensure such programs both in school and the community, by maintaining ongoing communication with community services, and by collaborative planning to prepare children and involve parents in these transitions. (They must) provide leadership in establishing procedures to ensure a smooth transition from community-based early childhood programs to public schools.

National Association of Elementary School Principals. (1990). *Early childhood education and the elementary school principal: Standards for quality programs for young children* (p.25) Alexandria, VA: Author.

STANDARD: The principal works with the home and the community toward easing transitions and addressing special needs and situations. In early childhood programs children make many transitions, such as from a day-care setting to a half-day school program or from among programs in a school. Such changes can be made smoother for both the children and their families through effective communication and cooperation among programs and school and community agencies.

QUALITY INDICATORS:

- Information sessions are held regularly to inform parents and other members of the community about the progress of the early childhood program and any special developments or planned changes
- When an individual child would be affected by a planned change, personal conversations are held with the child's parents to discuss reasons for the proposed change, and parents are involved in making any decisions regarding their child
- The school is in close contact with other early childhood programs in the community (Head Start, nursery schools, day-care operations, etc.) toward assuring a smooth transition into the school
- The school screens children for physical, developmental, or other factors to determine if special services are needed, works with the appropriate office or group to assure the provision of those services and arranges for their continuation in planning the child's placement
- Home visitations and special classes are made available for children who need help in making the transition from the home to the school setting.

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Community Guide to Transition Planning

Indicators	Occurs? No ? Yes	When?	Priority High Medium Low
1. Teachers and administrators from prekindergarten and kindergarten programs are acquainted with one another.	N ? Y		H M L
2. The community has a designated interagency/family group to work on transition planning.	N ? Y		H M L
3. The community has an action plan to improve transition to kindergarten for children and their families.	N ? Y		H M L
4. Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers and other staff use written transition procedures to plan activities to send children and their families on to kindergarten as well as to welcome newcomers into the school setting.	N ? Y		H M L
5. Prekindergarten and kindergarten programs have developed a timeline for transition activities that is then adapted to meet individual child and family needs.	N ? Y		H M L
6. The community has developed and periodically revises a written interagency agreement on transition.	N ? Y		H M L
7. Families are assisted in obtaining desired information and support, and they have opportunities to participate in planning their child's transition.	N ? Y		H M L
8. Parents receive an information guide to help them be actively involved in the transition process; parents know who to call with questions.	N ? Y		H M L
9. Prekindergarten and kindergarten programs have identified staff to coordinate transition planning and activities.	N ? Y		H M L
10. Prekindergarten and kindergarten programs have a system for exchanging information (exchange visits, curriculum materials, student records).	N ? Y		H M L
11. Prekindergarten teachers or transition coordinators review the steps of the transition process with families early in the year prior to transition.	N ? Y		H M L
12. For children receiving special education services, special transition issues are considered, transition-related goals and objectives are included in the child's IEP, and timelines are developed that allow children with disabilities to participate in transition activities with their nondisabled peers.	N ? Y		H M L
13. Prekindergarten programs notify schools well in advance about the number of children who will enter kindergarten.	N ? Y		H M L
14. Prekindergarten programs obtain written permission from parents to share information about their child with the kindergarten teacher.	N ? Y		H M L
15. Prekindergarten programs share information about children's experiences and accomplishments with kindergarten teachers (parent permission required).	N ? Y		H M L
16. Prekindergarten and kindergarten programs develop and implement a systematic plan of activities to prepare children and their families for transition to kindergarten and to welcome them into the elementary school.	N ? Y		H M L
17. For children with IEPs, the family and representatives from the prekindergarten and kindergarten programs meet early in spring to discuss future service options to accomplish the child's IEP goals, plan visits to potential classrooms, schedule needed evaluation activities and review the transition timeline; family and Transition Coordinator visit potential placements for the child; and the family and sending and receiving program staff participate in the placement conference to decide new IEP goals and location and type of services.	N ? Y		H M L
18. Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers visit one another's classrooms and plan together for continuity for children and families.	N ? Y		H M L
19. Prekindergarten children and their families visit the kindergarten.	N ? Y		H M L
20. Families share information with the kindergarten teacher about their children (interests and preferences, fears, medical information), their aims for the school experience and favorable times for communication between school and home.	N ? Y		H M L
21. Both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers receive ongoing training to teach a diversity of children in developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive ways.	N ? Y		H M L
22. Prior to the kindergarten children's entry, the school obtains necessary resources to teach them, including trained personnel, individually appropriate instructional materials, adaptive equipment and building modifications necessary to assure access of all children to all activities.	N ? Y		H M L
23. Prekindergarten and kindergarten curricula are linked to provide continuity for children's learning.	N ? Y		H M L
24. Families are encouraged to continue to participate actively in the events of the elementary school and in their children's learning.	N ? Y		H M L
25. The community's interagency transition planners have developed ways to continue needed services for families of children coming from Head Start.	N ? Y		H M L
26. The community's interagency transition planners conduct evaluations of the transition process and mutually consider changes to improve it for next year.	N ? Y		H M L

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